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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire formulated from sections of the Inventory on Family Life, prepared by the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth, was administered to over two thousand high school students in Rutherford County, Tennessee. The questionnaire was designed to gather responses on a five point scale regarding stable and unstable family characteristics, as outlined in the inventory. It was also designed to ascertain the degree to which these applied to the students' families. Approximately 265 black students completed the questionnaire. Areas of black family socialization which were contrasted with white family socialization were as follows: (1) demographic data, (2) mutual family trust and parental truthfulness, (3) mutual family respect and loyalty, (4) feelings of family togetherness and the perceived degree of "doing things together", (5) family friction: discipline of children, family quarrels, and divorce, and (6) community support: church attendance, school activities, and community activities. Findings indicated that although blacks were high in some "unstable" family characteristics such as separation, divorce, unemployment, poor housing, etc., an examination of their responses in the areas of the "stable" family did not reflect the stereotype of highly distressed, disorganized and deviant characteristics. Moreover, in some areas such as family togetherness, family respect, etc., blacks responded more postively than whites. This discrepancy suggests that the ususal black studies are too narrow in their focus on the problem aspects of black families. (Author/AM)

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FAMILY SOCIALIZATION PERCEPTIONS AMONG BLACK AND WHITE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN RUTHERFORD COUNTY, TENNESSEE: COMPARISON AND CONTRAST.

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A B S T R A C T

A questionnaire formulated from sections of the Inventory on Family Life prepared by the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth was administered to over two thousand high school students i. Rutherford County, Tennessee (adjoining Metropolitan Nashville).

The questionnaire was designed to gather responses on a five point scale regarding stable and unstable family characteristics, as outlined in the Inventory, asking for the degree to which these applied to the students' families. A Faculty Research Grant from Middle Tennessee State University provided support for a comprehensive computerized research analysis of the findings.

There were over two hundred fifty Black respondents in the population surveyed and although Blacks were high in some "unstable" family characteristics such as separation, divorce, unemployment, poor housing, etc. an examination of their responses in the areas of the "stable" family did not reflect the stereotype of highly distressed, disorganized and deviant characteristics, but in some areas such as family togetherness, family respect, etc., Blacks responded more positively than Whites.

This discrepancy suggested that the usual Black Studies are too narrow, focussing on the "problem" aspects of Black families. This research has been innovative in that it has attempted to study Black families apart from the ghettoes of Northern metropolises by comparing them with White families in a relatively small Southern city-county area.

Procedure

Every ten years since 1909, the President of the United States has called a Whitehouse Conference on Children and Youth. Each state governor is notified and, in turn, contacts a judge in each county. A committee is then formed to make a county-wide study of the conditions for youth. This writer was invited to be a member of the Rutherford County Committee and asked to work with the youth on the Committee. This sub-group formulated a questionnaire from the study guide inventory provided by the Tennessee Commission on Youth Guidance.

This questionnaire was given to all the students in Rutherford County High Schools (except Eagleville) and under a Faculty Research grant from MTSU the data have been, to a limited degree, analyzed.

Approximately 265 Black students completed the questionnaire. These responses have been studied, comparing those of Black and White in areas related primarily to patterns which affect family socialization. Using the chi square, levels of significance have been found in many areas of family living and the family's relationship to the community. This comparative scientific study of Black and White families in a similar area in the mid-South, reveals remarkable similarities rather than differences in Black/White family life.

Areas of Black family socialization which are contrasted with White in this research are as follows:

(1) Demographic data

(2) Mutual family trust and parental truthfulness

(3) Mutual family respect and loyalty

(4) Feelings of family togetherness and the perceived degree of "doing things together"

(5) Family frictions: discipline of children family quarrels and divorce

(6) Community support: church attendance, school activities and community activities

Demographic Data

Murfreesboro is a city with a population of about 25,000, located in Rutherford County, Tennessee, bordering Davidson (Nashville) County. About 12% of the city/county population is Black. There has been very little residential integration apart from federally funded housing projects. Certain areas of the city are assumed to be "Black" and although the housing is usually better than "shack", it is generally less than adequate, as indicated in response to the question regarding housing.
(See Table I.)

Murfreesboro is humming with many new industries, but job opportunities for Blacks seem to be rather poor here as in the rest of the nation. Students were asked to rate the community as to the unemployment situation and job opportunities:
(See Table II)

It would appear from these data that the Black families represented in this study are not on a "par" economically with Whites in this county and therefore would probably not be in the same socio-economic class.

Simpson and Yinger (1965: 185) suggest that many aspects of Black behavior are consequences of class status, not simply prejudice:

TABLE I

To what degree does the following apply to your family housing?

	Poor, Overcrowded	Average	Very Good
Black	9.1	47.2	43.6
White	3.5	37.3	59.2

chi square 25.36 S .001

TABLE II

To what degree does each of the following apply to your family?

	Unemployment			and	Job Opportunities		
	Constant Unemployment	Some Unemployment	Regular Employment		Unsatisfactory	Average	Good Opportunities
Black	9.2	16.2	74.6		9.7	38.0	52.0
White	6.5	8.5	85.0		0.3	26.0	69.0
	chi square 17.28		S .001		chi square 32.36		S .001

> Lower class Negroes often exhibit a low degree of motivation for education; but that this is not simply a product of their race status but in part a result of their class status as shown by the similar patterns of motivation found among lower class White children. Prejudice doubtless increases the likelihood that a Negro will be a member of the lower class and this lies behind this personality tendency; but class factor per se must also be considered.

As the following behavior characteristics are analyzed, it will be significant to bear in mind Simpson's hypothesis.

Mutual Family Trust and Parental Truthfulness

Despite the fact that Whites have traditionally entrusted their most precious possession, their children, to the care of Black women, and "maids" are left alone in White homes to clean, there has been a tendency to stereotype this minority group as untrustworthy. Even within the Black family, Rainwater (1968: 123) suggests that there is an underlying distrust:

> . . . The conceptions parents have of their children are such that they are constantly alert as the child matures to evidence that he is as bad as everyone else. That is, in lower-class culture, human nature is conceived of as essentially bad, destructive, immoral.

In response to the questions on trust within the family in this research, Blacks showed little difference from Whites.

The concept of "mutual trust" may have posed some problem of interpretation. However, there seems to be some consensus between the

two groups in that the chi squares were similar for both the question of mutual trust and the more specific question regarding parental truthfulness. (See Table III)

Actually, in both areas of trust, there appears to be a different pattern in the two groups; for the Blacks, there is a greater response than the Whites to "average" and less to the ends of the continuum, Whites averaging a higher percentage of both "good" (always and often) and "poor" (seldom and never).

It is noteworthy that parental truthfulness (always: 53, often: 32) is rated more highly than mutual trust in both groups. This seems to bear out the findings of a previous analysis of the combined Black and White responses comparing parent's truthfulness with their young people, and the youth's truthfulness with parents (always: 16, often: 52).

Mutual Family Respect and Loyalty

According to Cooley (looking glass self) and Mead (generalized other), socialization takes the form of judging ourselves from our perceptions of others' evaluations of us, and Blacks have traditionally accepted White stereotypes of themselves. Studies have found that Black college students had similar stereotypes of Blacks, as did their White classmates. (Newcomb et. al. 1965: 435). With negative stereotyping from the White community reinforced by Blacks who agree, it would tend to follow that Blacks would respect themselves very little and this lack of respect would permeate the home.

Rainwater states (1968a: 123):

> In Negro slum culture, growing up involves an ever-increasing appreciation of one's shortcomings, of the impossibility of

TABLE III

Rate your family as to (a) mutual trust, (b) parental truthfulness

	Very Good	Good	Average	Fair	Poor
Black	(a) 33.2	(a) 37.6	(a) 23.0	(a) 3.6	(a) 1.8
	(b) 48.9	(b) 32.8	(b) 14.2	(b) 1.8	(b) 1.5
White	(a) 36.0	(a) 38.4	(a) 17.2	(a) 4.5	(a) 3.0
	(b) 54.5	(b) 31.7	(b) 11.2	(b) 1.3	(b) 0.5

(a) chi square 6.10 N.S. .2

(b) chi square 6.8 N.S. .2

finding a self-sufficient and gratifying way of living. It is in the family first and most devastating that one learns these lessons . . . The result is a peculiar strength . . . (which) involves the ability to tolerate and defend against degrading verbal and physical aggressions from others and not to give up completely . . . Family members become potential enemies to each other.

In contrast, responses in this research indicate more respect amongst Black family members. It may be that, in this sample, education is becoming important; Rainwater suggests that as Black children recognize education as a means of escape from a difficult situation, then "Their commitment to school activities will feed back into their families in a positive way. The parents will feel proud rather than ashamed." (1968b: 126) It is important to note that both groups, Black and White, perceive a fairly high degree of respect in the home:

Very Much and Much Respect: Black 84.3; White 79.3

"Loyalty" is another concept which may be interpreted in various ways. Whether it connotes faithfulness, adherence (to family members) or duty (Webster), it would tend to indicate an element of support. Loyalty within the family would seem to be closely associated with a perceived degree of respect; in these responses there is not a significant statistical difference between Black and White.

Differences in the perceived loyalty within the family indicate that the Whites' seem to be greater than the Blacks'. It is difficult to understand why "respect" and "loyalty" would be different. This may be partially explained in terms of Rainwater's discussion of the matrifocal family (1968c: 114, 117):

> In Negro lower-class families women tend to look to their female relatives for support and counsel and to treat their husbands as essentially uninterested in the day-to-day problems of family living. Wives seem very willing to withdraw commitment from husbands who are not bringing money into the house. They take the point of view that he has no right to take up space around the house, to use facilities or to demand loyalty from her. The lack of control that mothers have over much that goes on in their households is most dramatically apparent in the fact that their older children seem to have the right to come home at any time once they have moved and to stay in the home without contributing to its maintenance. Though the mother may be resentful about being taken advantage of, she does not feel she can turn her children away.

There may be an indication here that rather than a loyalty to the family, the family is taken for granted. It is interesting to note that in comparing White responses to "respect" and "loyalty" they are quite similar, whereas the Black responses are quite different. (See Table IV)

These results may be interpreted in terms of semantics: to the White, respect and loyalty are synonymous--you are loyal to those whom you respect. To the Black it appears that this is not necessarily the case.

TABLE IV

White Responses:	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
Respect	45.9	33.4	14.5	3.6	1.9
Loyalty	46.2	34.7	13.6	3.1	1.4
Black Responses:	**(a)**	**(b)**	**(c)**	**(d)**	**(e)**
Respect	58.4	25.9	12.0	2.6	0.7
Loyalty	39.4	36.1	20.1	2.6	1.5

Respect chi square 14.7 S .01

Loyalty chi square 9.04 N.S. (.1 to .05)

Feelings of Family Togetherness and

Degree to Which Families "Do Things Together"

The responses to the two questions which asked for indications of family togetherness indicate that the prophecies of doom on the part of pessimistic family experts have not become reality in the functioning of the majority of these families. At least 60% of the Whites and 67% of the Blacks perceive strong family cohesiveness. However, the results appear to indicate that more Blacks both "do things together" (B: 57.7, W: 49.1) and "feel" more togetherness (B: 67.9, W: 60.4) than White families. Several interpretations may be drawn:

Whites have been brainwashed into a family togetherness approach. The "ideal type" family is one in which father plays baseball with his son and takes him on fishing trips, etc.; mother is a girl scout leader, assists the daughter in baking, cooking and sewing, loves to go with the family on camping trips, etc. Few families can live up to these requirements of "togetherness" but if they do not, White children are apt to feel that the family is not meeting expectations. Black children might not have such expectations but many define "doing things together" as visiting friends and relatives.

Another hypothesis which could be postulated is that part of a family's feeling of togetherness may be an outgrowth of a feeling of cooperation,--to what degree the members of the family help with the household chores. It appears that Black students are expected to carry their share of the chores more than the White.

(See Table V)

Still another interpretation that might be given for a greater feeling of family togetherness on the part of Blacks could center on the

TABLE V

Does each family member have suitable chores and do them?

	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Only When Asked	Never
Black	29.5	46.6	15.9	5.7	2.2
White	25.7	45.9	15.3	11.9	1.2

chi square 11.00 Sig. .03

degree of conflict between adolescents and parents. Curfew seems to be one problem in parent-teen relationships which might indicate a measure of friction. A significant difference does seem to exist.
(See Table VI)

The pattern of difference seems to not be centered in the areas of strong conflict (always and often) but within the median (sometimes) and lesser (seldom) conflict areas. Whites here appear to have less conflict. This could be interpreted in at least two ways: either the student usually conforms, or as suggested by Goslin (1969: 830), referring primarily to Whites,

> We observe that parents, particularly those in urban middle class settings . . . are extremely reluctant to establish constraints that appear to handicap the adolescent in his social activities and competition for status and acceptance.

The latter interpretation could at the same time explain both the lesser conflict with parents and the lack of family togetherness or cohesiveness.

Family Frictions: Discipline of Children,
Family Quarrels and Divorce

Discipline of young children and harmony (or lack of it) in the home are strong factors in the socialization process. Albert Bandura writes (1969: 379):

> There is a substantive body of evidence that novel modes of aggressive behavior are readily acquired through observation of aggressive models. Findings of these controlled investigations

TABLE VI

Do you find yourself in conflict with your parents regarding time to come in?

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
Black	17.1	14.0	35.0	18.6	15.3
White	15.1	18.4	24.4	25.6	16.7

chi square 16.47 Sig. .01

> lend support to field studies demonstrating the crucial role of modeling in the genesis of antisocial aggressive response patterns.

Gold (1958) examined this hypothesis in relation to Blacks and Whites and concluded that the first has a greater experience of physical punishment. This concept, that Black parents use physical punishment more often is not borne out in this research.

(See Table VII)

This research would indicate a difference in patterns of disciplining children between Blacks and Whites but not in the direction of more physical punishment. Rather, there appears to be 5% more likelihood of White children being spanked. Rainwater's findings shed some light (1968d: 117):

> In this culture there is little of the sense of awesome responsibility of caring for children that is characteristic of the working and middle class. . . As quickly as he can move around he learns to fend for himself. . . (Marriage) . . . for the girl means giving up a familiar and comfortable house that, unlike some other lower-class subcultures places few real restrictions on her behavior

This may partially explain the higher percentage of Blacks choosing (a). However, it is important to note that in the majority of cases, both Black and White children were disciplined in some way (c & d & e: B: 85.3, W: 87.0)

Along with the stereotype of more physical punishment for children, it is often assumed that Black couples fight more than White. According

TABLE VII

When you were in elementary school (age 6-12) and disobeyed an important family rule, your parents usually:

	Blacks	Whites
(a) Ignored your behavior	5.1	1.8
(b) Threatened and didn't carry out the threat	8.8	10.4
(c) Sat down and talked with you	32.1	28.8
(d) Punished in some way other than spanking	26.6	26.3
(e) Spanked you	26.6	31.9

to this research, although not statistically significant, there appears to be a little more quarrelling and fighting in White families (B. 8.0; W. 10.0).

If disharmony exists between husband and wife it may be more acceptable to the subculture for the Black parents to separate than it is for the White parents (see Rainwater 1968c). Whether this is a plausible hypothesis or not, Black families do experience more separation (B:19; W:11. S .001)

Community Support: Community Activities,
Church Attendance, School Activities

Community Activities

Ross and Wheeler (1971: 54), in their research on Black Belonging in Tampa, Florida, found that two in five (44 percent) of all their respondents belonged to one or more voluntary associations apart from churches and unions. They did not include White, therefore, no comparisons can be made of two populations.

(1) One-fifth belonged to one voluntary association

(2) One-ninth belonged to two voluntary associations

(3) One-tenth belonged to three or more voluntary associations.

Other research indicates a range of percentages of belonging:

(1) American Institute of Public Opinion, 1954	54%
(2) National Opinion Research Center, 1955	27%
(3) Survey Research Center, 1952	69%
(4) Babcheck and Thompson	75%

As with Whites, the higher the Black social status, the greater the membership in voluntary associations. About two-thirds of the Blacks in high status occupations belonged to a voluntary association while two-thirds of the unemployed belonged to none.

Almost all respondents with five or more memberships were professionals.

The research done here for the Whitehouse Conference study was not detailed regarding type of voluntary organization, nor does it deliberately separate church membership from other organizations. Some respondents may have included church in community organizations in spite of the fact that another question asked about church attendance. The data indicate that Blacks are involved in community organizations to a greater degree than Whites (Nearly every night. B: 8.8; W: 3.9).

Herskovits (1958: 180) would claim a relationship between the Black tendency to join voluntary associations in America and the African heritage:

> Cooperation among the Negroes of this country is principally found in such institutions as lodges and other benevolent societies, which in themselves are directly in line with the tradition underlying similar African organizations. The role of the secret societies in the parts of Africa from which the slaves were derived is well known. . . (also) . . . It is the non-secret societies. . . that in time of need assure their members access to resources greater than those of any individual, which give this type of society an especially significant part in assuring stability to African social structure.

Church Attendance

Church attendance was not included in the above, but church-related activities could have been. The question "Does your family go to church together" tends to imply Sunday service more than church-related organizations.

A statement regarding who goes more, Blacks or Whites is not in order with this material. However, an analysis indicates a different pattern of church attendance. When attendance more than once a week is included (Sunday evening service, prayer meeting, Sunday School, etc.) the White population is slightly higher, yet the Whites "never" attend to a larger degree than the Blacks. Weekly attendance is similar for both groups.

Comparing responses to the questions regarding membership in organizations and attendance at church, it is apparent that different patterns of activity prevail.

(See Table VIII)

Apparently, attending church was not considered to be membership in community organizations, as indicated above.

Support of School Activities:

Educational Implications

In the mid 1960's, schools in Rutherford County offered the "freedom of choice" in schools to its residents. This writer had children in elementary school and was most impressed as a newcomer to Murfreesboro in 1967 with the numbers of Black parents who attended P.T.A. and school open houses. After the above date, the Black elementary school was changed into a middle school, the Black high school was made a vocational annex to the Central High School and both Black and White children were bussed. This integration of schools took place without incident.

It is important to note that according to the demographic data of Rutherford County, about 12% are Black, and computing the numbers responding to the questionnaires in this research, 12.2% of the high school population

TABLE VIII

Community Organizations	B	W	Church Attendance	B	W
nearly every night	8.8	3.9	more than once a week	19.0	22.7
frequently	19.7	21.2	weekly	34.3	33.2
occasionally	36.1	32.8	occasionally	25.2	21.6
seldom	16.8	23.6	monthly	6.9	3.5
never	15.3	15.9	never	11.3	16.6

is also Black. Apparently, the Black segment of this community, on a par with Whites, is stressing the need for education. This being the case, Black educational achievement in this county should indicate a large Black middle class.

No attempt was made to inquire into the academic achievement of the students in the county's high schools since this was primarily a family and community research project. However, the question was asked "Do members of your family support school activities?" The responses to this question indicate that Blacks support the school to a similar degree as the Whites. (B: 52.2; W: 48.8 - chi square 2.96-N.S.)

These findings also support the observations of Elaine Burgess/ that (1969:267)
the Black population is increasingly realizing that:

> Education and occupational achievement are highly valued. Education is the avenue to necessary training and skills for getting ahead, for inculcating the youth with the "right democratic values," the right motivations, the right commitments to the future and the right patterns of behavior. A high school diploma is increasingly essential, and sacrifice to send children on to college is a positive good. . . The gap between educational attainment of Negroes and Whites has narrowed during the past twenty years. . .

As previously noted, the population of this research seems to be a cross-section of the Black community in Rutherford County; however, the findings appear to indicate a tendency toward the patterns assessed by several sociologists as Black middle class rather than Rainwater's ghetto slum culture. Thus, some discussion of the material regarding the Black middle class is in order.

Billingsley (1968: 97) claims that Blacks have made advancements through "screens of opportunities" (Chapter 4),--that Negroes are not "self-made" men but have had assistance in finding and using these opportunities. The chief characteristic of Black men and women of achievement is a strong family life.

> Strong families are those which seem to be guided in their patterns of interaction among members (togetherness, loyalty, respect) and with the outside world by a definite set of values or philosophy with an accompanying pattern of behavior consistent with those values. . . Strong families are often highly influenced by the religious convictions and behavior, (53% attend church once a week or more), the education or educational aspirations of one or more members (support of school activities: 52%). . .Negro families have placed heavy emphasis and reliance on interactions with both relatives (Quote: Rainwater) and non-relatives. . . Thus figures of importance in the community--the chief, or elders, the minister, teacher or other responsible adults--have always been called upon to help the family socialize its children.

One of the keys to the attainment of a Black middle class status is the presence of the father figure in the home. Frazier (1959:329-30) suggests that the opportunities for Black men to work in (a) industry, especially as skilled workers, (b) clerical occupations and (c) service occupations have enabled 'the male head of the family (to have) sufficient economic security to play the conventional role of provider for his family without the aid of the wife."

The question regarding occupation in this research was an open-ended one which respondents completed. Unfortunately, they were analyzed on a five-point scale by student assistants and classified as seen in Table IX. The areas of "skilled" and "unskilled" were classified together and therefore it is impossible to make the distinction here between lower class unskilled and middle class skilled. Also, there may be both lower and middle class combined under the heading of "services" since this could include both garbage men and mail carriers.

(See Table IX)

In the Black middle class family, the husband is generally recognized as the head of the family; however, Frazier (1959a: 330) suggests:

> . . . the wife is not completely subordinated. There is often a division of labor in the management of the household and a spirit of democracy in the family. The dignified and respected position of the wife and mother is due partly to the tradition of independence among Negro women.

Many authorities would agree with Herskovits, that this "dignified and respected" position of the Black woman is a carry-over of the West African matrifocal family.

It would appear from this research, that many of the Black families in Rutherford County are rather stable and that with sufficient "screens of opportunities", many will, in the next generation, become middle class citizens.

TABLE IX

Father's Occupation

	Farm	Unskilled/ Skilled	Services	Business	Professional
Black	7.3	22.3	23.7	9.1	8.0
White	6.2	15.8	30.6	18.7	13.0

(The above figures do not total 100%. In 19% of Black families and 11% of White, parents were not living together. Other respondents did not fill this in).

Conclusions

Rarely has sociological literature looked at the responsible Black citizen and very rarely, if at all, have social scientists actually compared the White and the Black in a community.

Contribution to Knowledge

This research has been innovative in that it has attempted to analyze the Black family

(a) apart from the Ghetto

(b) in a relatively small Southern city rather than a Northern metropolis

(c) by comparing it with the White family

This study has found that far from being irresponsible citizens, the Blacks of Rutherford County support the schools and attend church as do the Whites, and even exceed the Whites in membership in community organizations. Although good work opportunities and good housing are less available for the Blacks than Whites, there is a remarkable resilience in that Black family members help with chores, have a spirit of family togetherness and family respect that exceeds that of the Whites. Billingsley (1968a: 199) summarizes this resilience in the following conclusion:

> Despite the fact that the vast majority of Negro Families are stable, conforming and achieving, and cause no problems

> to anybody, the tendency to view them in negative terms persists. . . Mo ynihan and his staff examined the 1960 national census data and found that nearly a quarter of all Negro families were headed by femaies and that nearly a quarter of all Negro babies that year were born out of wedlock. . . He concluded quite incorrectly, that the Negro family in this country is falling apart and failing to make their way in the world. . . Mo ynihan paid very little attention to the fact that seventy-five percent of Negro families met his criteria of stability.

The findings from this study indicate that as Black families have the opportunity and encouragement to achieve stability, at least in Rutherford County, Tennessee, the majority have produced responsible American citizens.

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